

# Social capital: approaches to definition and measurement

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of the wide range of problems associated with the absence of the unified approach to the definition of the concept of social capital. The research addresses the issue of a methodological approach development to define the role of social capital by creating a hierarchy including the concepts of social norm and social standard. The key categories of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital were established with the help of quantitative analysis. The authors conclude that the concept of social capital can be regarded as the highest evolutionary stage in the development of the social sphere of society. The article analyzes and systematizes the set of scientific works that explore the concept of social capital. Taking into account the results of the present study will allow specialists from various fields of science to use key categories of the concepts of social norm, social standard, social capital, identified by the authors, and will also allow to develop the concept of social capital with the help of hierarchically established relationships of this scientific category with other concepts.

**Keywords:** social capital, social standard, social norm.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, the concept of social capital has become increasingly in demand among a number of disciplines in the social, economic and political sciences (Willem & Scarbrough, 2006). The examination of such scientific and practical category as the social capital turns out to be essential while studying the issues of economic growth, the proper functioning of state and public institutions, as well as the development of the social sphere.

More and more researchers are using the concept of social capital in their papers seeking answers to the questions that concern them. Despite the growing interest to social capital, this term has not been accompanied by an appropriate degree of theoretical integration within the various disciplines (Kamolov, 2017). As a result, until now there has been no consensus on the benefits, risks, and meanings of the concept of social capital (Wei et al., 2011).

Some researchers believe that social capital and trust are the most important factors determining the long-term economic and social development of a country (Guiso et al., 2004; Kamolov & Smagina, 2020). Others urge a complete rejection of the concept, criticizing social capital as a constantly rewritten scientific category (Fine, 2010). Such a schism in the scientific community arises due to the lack of a unified methodological approach to the explanation of the general conceptual framework that characterizes this concept.

However, the versatility of the concept causes problems in the search for exact words to describe the term universally (Kamolov et al., 2019). In the scientific literature, this problem has been raised a number of times. Various authors have devoted their works to the study of the evolution of the concept

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of social capital: Thomas G. Poder's article "What is social capital? A Critical Review" contains an analysis of the most famous concepts of social capital of the 1980s-2000s and their critical assessments (Poder, 2011). Also, the book by American researcher Eric F. Lesser "Knowledge and Social Capital: Foundations and Applications" (Lesser, 2000) provides an analysis of classical works and offers an original conceptual framework defining the sources, benefits and risks of social capital.

## 2 Materials and Methods

The main purpose of our study was to develop a methodological approach to the identification of the relationship between the concepts of social norm, social standard, and social capital, based on a hierarchical model. The main tasks to achieve the goal were:

1. Analyses of scientific works, normative legal acts, standards and declarations of international and domestic organizations in order to find clearly formulated definitions of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital.
2. Assemble and structure the definitions that we have found.
3. Identification of the dominant categories and calculation of frequency of these categories usage in the whole list of definitions.
4. Identification of the 6 most frequently used categories for each of the concepts and creation of a graph of definitions based on the identified dominants.
5. Proving hypotheses with the obtained results.

Prior to collecting definitions of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital, we analyzed the classical papers of the authors who laid the theoretical foundations for the concept of social capital. As a result of the analysis of scientific works we formulated two hypotheses. H1: by identifying the key categories of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital it is possible to build a hierarchical model. H2: the concept of social capital in the current system of socio-economic processes should take the highest level of development of the social sphere of the state, based on the other two fundamental concepts of social norm and social standard.

The definitions were collected from the following sources: scientific articles (we used such resources as Web of Science, SSRN (Social Studies Research Network), Scopus, Springer, ScienceDirect), normative legal documents of the Russian Federation and other states, standards and declarations of international and domestic companies. The obtained list of definitions was examined with the help of quantitative analysis of the dominant categories that are most often used in definitions of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital. To construct a graph of definitions we used a simple formula of percentage of two numbers (1), where  $a$  – is the total number of collected definitions,  $b$  – is the number of mentions of the key category and  $p$  – is the percentage of mentions of the key category in the list of definitions.

$$\frac{b}{a} \times 100 = p (\%) \quad (1)$$

## 3. Results

In an article entitled "A Vision of the Foundations of Social Theory" (1992), J.S. Coleman defines the concept of social norm as one of the constitutional variables of the social system (Coleman, 1992). This term, often used as an exogenous variable explaining the limitedness or predetermination of goals and means of social action, arose long before the emergence of the social standard and social capital, since the genesis of social norms occurred simultaneously with the advent of human society (Holmes & Panagopoulos, 2014). The concept of social norm has the richest research history compared to the other two concepts. Because of this, we were able to collect 70 definitions of the social norm. The analysis of the definitions revealed 6 dominant categories that were most frequently mentioned in the definitions. We will list these categories in descending order of frequency of their use: rules (more than 35 mentions), society (34 mentions), behavior model (22), standard (21), social sanctions (16), and social control (8). To calculate the percentage of repetitions of key categories in the list of

definitions, we used the formula of the percentage ratio of two numbers and reflected the obtained results in the graph.

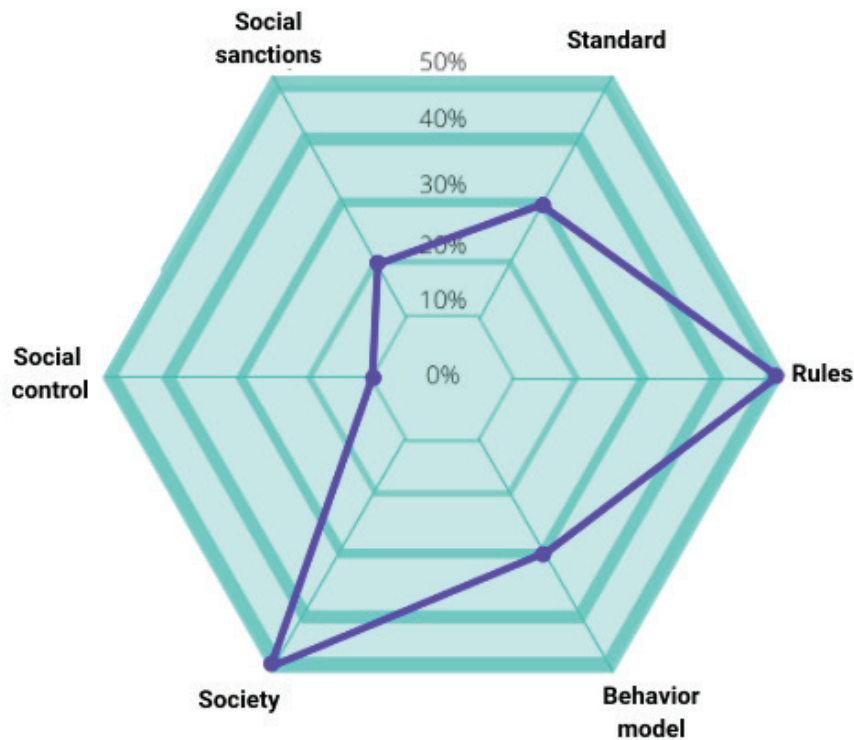


Fig.1 Quantitative measurement of the set of key categories most commonly used in definitions of the social norm. Compiled by the authors.

The attainment of a high level of the quality of life is currently one of the most important strategic goals of developed and developing countries (Shchetkina, 2010). In this context the formation of a system social standards is becoming more and more important. The definition of the social standard was most frequently used in the normative-legal acts of the CIS countries, especially in the legislation of Ukraine (“On state social standards and state social guarantees”, 2017) and the Republic of Belarus (“On the state minimum social standards”, 1999). In the Russian legislation there were several attempts to formulate the concept of a social standard, but they were not adopted. The definition and legislative consolidation of the concept of "social standard" was supposed to be a summarizing statement of social policy, proving and concretizing the sociality of power, as well as specifying the social rights of citizens (Belousova, 2007). Turning to the experience of Western countries, we noticed that the definition of social standards often includes two other concepts: social protection and social inclusion. Thus, the essence of the social standard in the EU interpretation (European Commission, 2022) consists of two main components: social protection and social inclusion, which in turn include providing citizens with unemployment benefits, family and child benefits, pensions, disability benefits, establishing a minimum income, and they are also designed to guarantee protection from risks and ensure the basic needs related to unemployment, loss of a spouse or parent, illness and social isolation.

After analyzing the entire list of definitions, the number of which reached 40, we also calculated the percentage of frequently mentioned categories in the definitions of the concept of social standard.

Let us list these categories in descending order: government (more than 20 mentions), guarantees (12 mentions), social protection (10), government services (10), norm (6) and needs (4). Using this quantitative method of research, we also built a graph of key categories for the concept "social standard" (Fig.2)

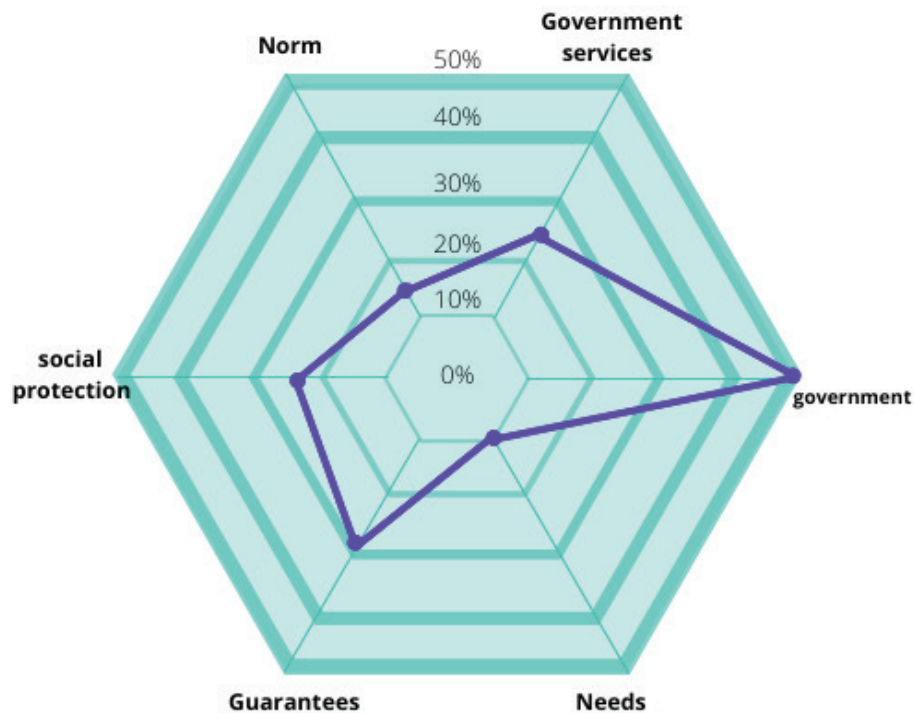


Fig.2 Quantitative measurement of the set of key categories most commonly used in definitions of the social standard. Compiled by the authors.

In the course of our analysis of definitions of social capital, we identified the following pattern. Classical definitions made by sociologists, political scientists and economists can be divided into two types, depending on whether they focus primarily on the relationships that an individual maintains with others, or on the connections that characterize the internal structure of an organization. The first group considers social capital as an asset that facilitates and helps the subject, and as a resource embedded in the network that connects an individual with others (Baker, 1990; Belliveau et al., 1996; Boxman et al., 1991; Burt, 1992). This view, which is more widespread among sociologists, comes from the idea that the activity of individuals and groups can be greatly facilitated by their membership in social networks, in particular by their direct and indirect ties with other participants in these networks. According to this view, social capital can help explain the divergent success of individuals and firms in competitive rivalry. The sociological studies of social capital have been greatly affected by network theorists, and this view of social capital is reflected in the self-centered version of network analysis.

The second group of studies of social capital focuses on this phenomenon as a feature of internal ties that determine the structures of collective agents (groups, organizations, communities, regions,

nations) and give them the cohesion and related benefits that are primarily manifested in socio-economic growth (Brehm & M. R. W., 1997; Inglehart, 1997; Loury, 1992). This point of view is more widespread among political scientists and economists who deal with development matters, and is also reflected in the sociocentric (Sandefur & Laumann, 1988) and mostly "whole-network" (Woolcock, 1988) approaches of the sociology of networks.

The final list consisted of 50 definitions, out of which we also identified six key categories, which are listed in descending order of frequency of use: growth (socio-economic and personal) (20 mentions), network (20 mentions), resources (16), norms (10), economy (10), trust (5). (Fig. 3.)

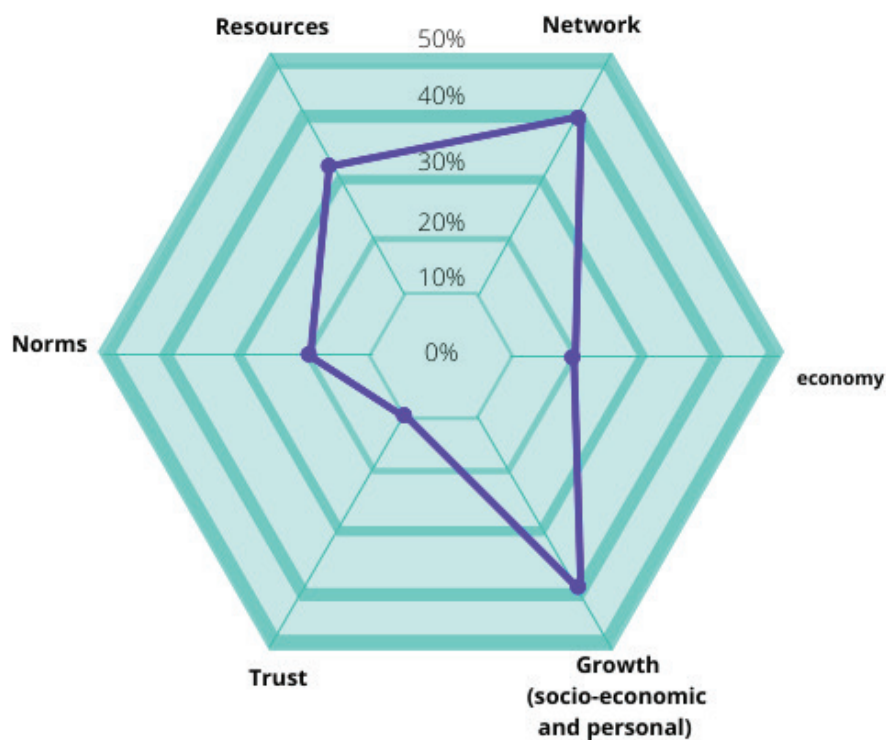


Fig.3 Quantitative measurement of the set of key categories most commonly used in definitions of social capital. Compiled by the authors.

#### 4 Discussion

The hypothesis of our study was based on the assumption that it is necessary to define social capital as the highest evolutionary stage in the development of the social sphere of the state. In this regard, due to the information obtained and the quantitative analysis of the key categories in the definitions, we were able to prove that the hierarchy that consists of the concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital has the right to exist. We explain this conclusion by the fact that the two most popular categories in the concept of social norm were "rule" and "society", which means that the essence of social norm, in its brief description, is that society produces rules, which society itself strives to comply with, while controlling this with formal and informal social sanctions. In the concept of social norm we attach the fundamental importance to the hierarchy of three concepts.

The two most common categories in the concept of the social standard are «government" and "guarantees," which means that the social standard is an instrument of the state that allows to guarantee the rights of citizens and allows to provide the vital needs of citizens. We place the social

standard in the hierarchy higher than the social norm, because with the help of social norms society makes a demand for the benefits that it needs, which in turn cover the social standard at the minimum essential level, which is inextricably connected with the state and with guarantees of ensuring human rights. Social norms cannot stand above social standards, otherwise the state cannot receive requests from society for what it needs.

We consider social capital to be the highest level of development of the social sphere of the state and this is determined by the results of our study. The most important categories of social capital were the concepts of "socio-economic or personal growth", as well as "networks". Social networks are social contacts, which involve all kinds of interactions between people, which can arise in the process of joint activity. Through the use of such a category as networks, social capital has limitless potential for development, and therefore is the highest boon for the social sphere of the state. As a result of the study we confirmed our hypotheses and presented them in the form of a hierarchy.

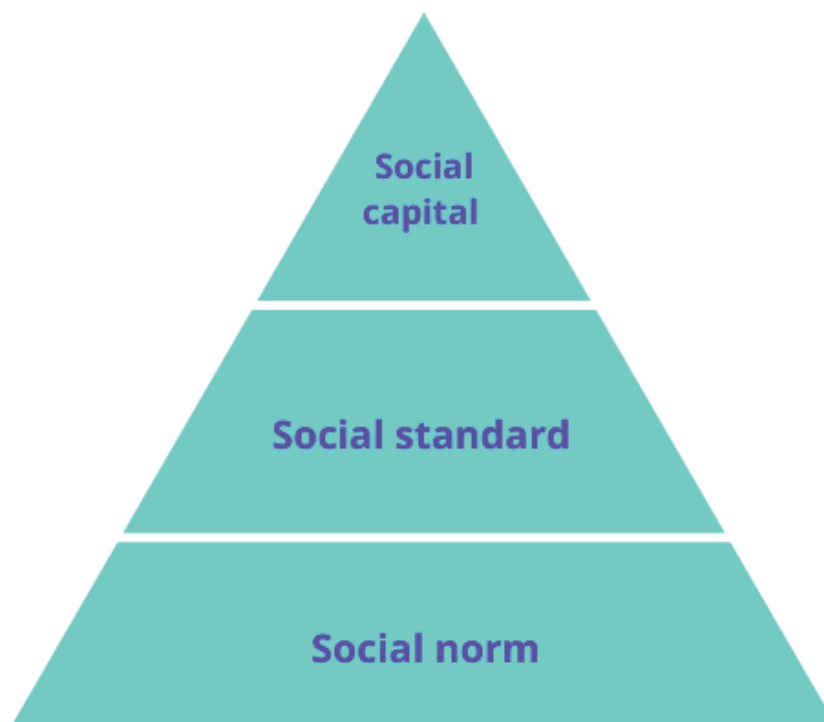


Fig. 4. Hierarchy of concepts of social norm, social standard and social capital. Compiled by the authors.

While searching for studies comparing and evaluating these three concepts, we encountered the fact that previously authors had only compared the concepts of social norm and social capital, often describing the social norm as a component of social capital (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). No one had previously looked for a relationship between these three concepts: social norm, social standard, and social capital.

## 5. Conclusion

Social capital is a theoretical and policymaking tool that can be used to transcend theories of modernization and world systems, and to make potentially significant contributions to issues of economic development that will, in turn, supplement orthodox economic approaches and, at the same

time, challenge them. Since historians, political scientists, anthropologists, economists, and sociologists define social capital in different ways, our work can initiate subsequent studies of key categories of the concept in order to provoke an open, constructive debate on the issue in scientific community. The theoretical assertions and policy guidance made on the basis of a gradual amassing of evidence and information on the topic of social capital provide a robust agenda for forthcoming research.

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